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SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/23/2019

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL RS GG

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: MONITORS FIND NO BUILD-UP OF GEORGIAN FORCES ALONG ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARY

REF: TBILISI 0082

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES A.I. KENT LOGSDON 1.4(B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: According to recent briefings by the EU and UN in Tbilisi, European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) and United Nations Observation Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) monitors conducted no-notice inspections of Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA) police stations and checkpoints along the administrative boundaries with South Ossetia and Abkhazia the week of February 17. They found no evidence to substantiate Russian allegations of Georgian special forces (spetsnaz) build-up. Both organizations characterized the Georgians as cooperative, showing good will to honor their commitment to the Georgian Memorandum of Agreement on prior notification of movement of forces. End Summary.

No-Notice Inspections

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¶2. (C) Both EUMM and UNOMIG conducted no-notice inspections at MOIA police stations and check points, as well as Senaki military base, during the week of February 17. On February 19, Ambassador Haber told representatives at an EUMM weekly update that on the previous day EUMM monitors had visited 33 police stations and checkpoints along the administrative boundary with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The EUMM observers noted that the number of Georgian police forces were approximately the same as when EUMM monitors first got access to the former "buffer zone" on October 7, 2008. He noted that EUMM monitors generally received full access and Georgians counterparts were cooperative. UNOMIG reports indicated that Russian allegations were that there were approximately 2000 Georgian MOIA and military personnel with heavy weapons in the areas adjacent to Abkhazia.

¶3. (C) According to a February 23 briefing by the UN, on February 19-20 UNOMIG launched patrols to all MOIA observation points along the cease-fire line and Senaki military base. UNOMIG reports noted that the Commander of the Second Department of the Special Task Force (MOIA) confirmed that his men (numbering 200) were being replaced temporarily by 177 policemen from the third department. During this transition phase, the commander would remain in charge and one officer from the second department would remain at each of the four main MOIA stations. The temporary change was to permit second department to conduct training in Tbilisi. The MOIA listed 14 observation points along the cease-fire line, which corresponded to UNOMIG figures. The Georgian MOD representative, Colonel Pashtiani, told UNOMIG monitors on February 20, that there were no Georgian military troops adjacent to the Cease-Fire Line (CFL). UNOMIG monitors confirmed that lack of heavy weapons on the Georgian side of the CFL and absence of any unusual activity at Senaki military base. EUMM teams, who had also been at Senaki base earlier, also confirmed this finding.

Comment

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¶4. (C) Both EUMM and UNOMIG verified Georgian MOIA strengths during the same week, ostensibly without coordinating with each other. In a February 23 meeting, UN SRSG Ambassador Verbeke discussed with the Charge, and British and German Ambassadors the future of the UNOMIG observer mission, how coordination between EUMM and UNOMIG could work, and provisions that would be acceptable to all sides involved. He suggested that the UN and EU needed to intensify cooperation given the distinct possibility that there would be no OSCE future monitoring mission. There was a discrepancy on how UNOMIG and EUMM report violations, specifically the quantity and type of equipment in the restricted zone. UNOMIG, OSCE, and EUMM representatives met on February 19, to discuss how an incident management scheme would work and will meet again February 23 to submit various proposals to the group. Even if these parties who have a stake in the continuing monitoring missions have not signed an agreement on how it would work for now, the three monitoring missions themselves are beginning to talk amongst themselves about technical aspects of how future operations would work.

LOGSDON